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**A Conceptual Model and Research Agenda for Bidding, Planning and Delivering  
Major Sport Events that Lever Human Rights**

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**Abstract**

In this conceptual paper, the authors propose a framework for how progressive human rights outcomes may be obtained in the context of bidding, planning and implementing major sport events (MSEs) through the implementation of four pathways, including good governance, the democratic participation of stakeholders, the formalisation of human rights agendas, and the deployment of sensitive urban development. The authors argue that there is a need for adherence to internationally recognised standards, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights if rhetorical statements from MSE awarding bodies and host organisers are to be accountable to a wider set of actors. If researchers and practitioners want to address some of the critical issues related to human rights and MSEs, it is imperative that key actors working in the rights sphere are involved in shaping the research agenda and monitoring its implementation. Academics need to take a proactive approach aimed at achieving both theoretically grounded and practically relevant solutions, with engagement occurring over an extended period of time. This approach, avowedly political and concerned with genuine action, is a key way in which MSE stakeholders can be held to account for their actions in regard to human rights.

Keywords: event hosting; mega sport events; Olympic Games; FIFA World Cup; event legacy

## Introduction

Major sporting events (MSEs) have been the subject of increasing levels of critique in recent years for the social costs associated with their bidding, planning and delivery. The rationale used by cities and countries for hosting MSEs is often the potential for an event to generate positive social transformation within the host area (Brittain, Bocarro, Byers, & Swart, 2017). Although MSEs can have positive impacts on their hosts (Chalip, 2017; Taks, Misener, Chalip, & Green, 2013), the way they are enacted often sets these events up to fail to achieve their stated aims. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the actual impact of hosting MSEs regularly falls short of these lofty predictions and, in reality, sometimes results in detrimental effects for host populations (Barclay, 2009; Brittain et al., 2017).

The negative impacts of MSEs have variously been reported as: exacerbating human rights abuses in host countries (Caudwell & McGhee, 2018; Horne, 2018; Suzuki, Ogawa, & Inaba, 2018; Talbot & Carter, 2018); facilitating corruption (Meier & Garcia, 2015); supporting elite beneficiaries over those most in need (Braathen, Mascarenhas, & Sorboe, 2016; Coaffee, 2015); and transforming host destinations' urban environments by displacing vulnerable populations (Gaffney, 2015; Osborn & Smith, 2016; Steinbrink, 2013). For example, some of the recently held mega sport events (a specific category of the largest and potentially most impactful MSEs, such as the Olympic Games and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup; Müller, 2015) have been the subject of international condemnation for being the catalyst for human rights abuses. The suggested maltreatments surrounding the Olympic Games include forced evictions (as evidenced for Beijing 2008 and Rio de Janeiro 2016; Suzuki et al., 2018), restricting media freedom through censorship (Burchell, 2015; Sochi 2014), abuse of migrant labour in the construction of stadia and associated facilities (as evidenced for Sochi 2014 and Qatar 2022;

Millward, 2017), sex trafficking (as evidenced for Vancouver 2010; Caudwell, 2018; Finkel & Matheson, 2015) and increased political repression (as evidenced for Beijing 2008 and Russia 2018; Müller, 2017). Minky Worden (2017 [online]) of Human Rights Watch (HRW), an international non-profit, non-governmental organisation, has suggested that, “time after time, Olympic hosts have gotten away with abusing workers building stadiums, and with crushing critics and media who try to report about abuses...the right to host the Olympics needs to come with the responsibility not to abuse basic human rights”.

The criticism of MSEs on their failure to deliver on suggested impacts has led to a crisis in recent years for MSE awarding bodies and other stakeholders as more prospective bid nations withdraw from the bid process (Hiller & Wanner, 2018; Maese, 2017). During the bid process for the 2024 Olympic Games, the cities of Boston, Budapest, Hamburg and Rome all entered, and eventually withdrew, due to a lack of local political and public support (Lauermann & Vogelpohl, 2017; Oliver & Lauermann, 2017). A similar picture emerged from the bidding process for the Winter Olympics of 2022, where controversy over cost, environmental impact and human rights tarnished the bidding contest. The FIFA World Cup has also been embroiled in controversy, with attention focused on human rights abuses related to labour practices, the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities and political dissent in both Russia 2018 (Millward, 2017) and Qatar 2022 (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

The purpose of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework for how progressive human rights outcomes may be obtained in the context of bidding, planning and implementing MSEs through the implementation of good governance, the democratic participation of stakeholders, the formalisation of human rights agendas, and the deployment of sensitive urban development. Based

on the conceptual model, we propose a research agenda, with accompanying research methods that can provide a roadmap to further the MSE human rights agenda.

Structurally, we begin by reviewing the literature on MSEs and progressive social opportunities, before considering how human rights have (or have not) been effectively enshrined in MSE governance arrangements. We then detail four pathways to a rights-based approach to MSEs and develop this into a proposed conceptual model and research agenda for scholars, before offering some concluding comments.

### **Protection or promotion? MSEs and the human rights agenda**

In recent years, the extant academic literature on MSEs has been in conflict with the public relations activities of the awarding bodies and organisers. Some of the empirical research has, historically, been less positive about some of the impacts and benefits of hosting MSEs than those offered by proponents of these mega spectacles (e.g., Alm, Solberg, Storm & Jakobsen, 2016; Taks et al., 2013). However, the weight of evidence against the benefits of MSEs has not, until recently, led to a decrease in their attractiveness for potential hosts.

While human rights have been enshrined in the fabric of the international community for more than half a century, since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, they have been largely marginalised in discussions of the impact of MSEs – at least until the last decade. While the focus of this paper is not about conceptualisations of human rights *per se*, it is important to acknowledge the contested history of this term, especially in relation to two of its key principles - promotion and protection. Though the UDHR expounds the notion of universality, it has also been subject to critique for its cultural relativism and association with a western and global north discourse (Caudwell & McGee, 2018). Certainly, in the context of recent

debates about MSEs in non-democratic nations (e.g., Qatar), alternative notions of rights (of the child, women, and LGBTQ people) have been projected, highlighting the ongoing conflict around universal rights in a globalised world.

Horne (2018) suggests that there are fluid boundaries around the concept of human rights, but that their protection and visibility has been aided publicly by the emergence of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International (AI) and HRW who have monitored, published and intervened to address abuses across the world. Horne (2018) also illustrates how the transnational (inside and outside of nation state) and intersectional (e.g., gender, sexuality and generational) nature of human rights adds to the complexity of their construction, promotion and protection. For example, the case of sex trafficking is a case in point. Finkel and Matheson (2015), focusing on the lead up to the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, highlighted how sex trafficking can be exacerbated when MSEs are hosted in a city. Caudwell (2018), however, suggests that understanding the role of MSEs in exacerbating this problem is hampered by the difficulty in defining sexual exploitation and separating it from consensual, commercial sex work. She goes on to argue that sporting events provide “certain conditions at specific times” (p. 547) that can lead to injustices, exploitation and harm but proposes more research to understand the extent of the problem and effective legislative and policy measures to reduce its impact.

MSEs have been implicated in the violation of human rights throughout the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (Adams & Piekarz, 2015), despite NGOs and civil society groups advocating for their protection when MSEs are being bid for, planned and delivered. In this time, neither legal nor moral action has been successful at curtailing the exploitative activities of MSEs, which often appear to increase rather than ameliorate inequality and injustice (Boykoff, 2013; Dowse, Powell & Weed, 2018; Gaffney, 2015).



Gaffney (2010, 2015), for example, has shown, through his extended activist-academic work in Brazil, and Rio de Janeiro in particular, how MSEs create and reinforce geographies of exclusion, exacerbating inequalities and injustices associated with access to housing and transport. Coaffee (2015) focused on Olympic security processes and highlighted how freedom of movement and assembly were controlled in Sochi before and during the 2014 Winter Olympics, effectively creating a state of emergency where legal and social rights were suspended for the duration of the Olympic Games. This extended to the extremely restricted space (and time) given over to those people campaigning for gay rights in Sochi during the Olympic Games. Furthermore, Millward (2017) has shown how labour rights have been infringed in Qatar in the construction of stadia for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, and the complicity of FIFA, the Qatari authorities, corporate sponsors and construction companies in that process. All these examples indicate that inequality and injustice may be reinforced in the context of MSEs.

Not only are human rights issues pertaining to MSEs' complex and contested nature in terms of their construction, promotion and protection, they are also impacted by processes of mediation. Talbot and Carter (2018) highlight how human rights issues were mediated in Brazil before and during the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic Games. They suggest that although activists campaigned against rights abuses including housing evictions, police violence and child sex trafficking, these issues were reported differently in the world's media. They suggest that human rights are contested, because they depend on how personhood is conferred by the nation state. In Brazil, they argue that "the vulnerable, such as those who lack adequate housing, the marginalised and the impoverished, depend on rights more than ever yet their very marginality transforms them into easily exploitable subjects not due full consideration under the "human" part of human rights" (p. 78). Housing is not a universal right in Brazil and state sanctioned violence is also defensible

under the differentiated citizenship that exists in that nation. Housing evictions and state-sponsored violence against the marginalised were both used in the run up to the 2016 Olympics, violating human rights principles.

Finally, referring to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Suzuki et al. (2018) show how the elderly and the homeless were denied autonomy when being evicted from their homes in preparation for that particular MSE. Denying the right to housing is a common feature of MSEs' planning with Kennelly (2015) also highlighting the consequences of neoliberal urbanisation on the most vulnerable parts of the host city population. Thus, vulnerable groups can be at great risk when MSEs are bid for, planned and hosted.

The “social life of rights” (Caudwell & McGee, 2018, p. 2) represents a way of thinking about how MSEs might either reinforce existing power relations or open up conversations about meaningful social change because of the media interest in these events. Despite contributing to apparent human rights abuses, in the form of forced labour, sex trafficking and the displacement of vulnerable populations, MSEs also represent high profile media platforms where violations can be exposed, contestation made visible, and dialogue about progressive change facilitated (Caudwell & McGee, 2018). As Horne (2018) suggests, “sporting mega-events have become especially notable focal points for social criticism and unrest because they provide internationally visible opportunities for critics to protest perceived inequalities, corruption or social injustice” (p. 17). There is some evidence that in the last decade the heightened public awareness of MSEs and their effects is leading to more interest and attention to the promotion and protection of human rights via the governance arrangements for these events.

### **Doing the right thing: Enshrining human rights in MSE governance**

If MSEs are to be considered a vehicle for the protection and promotion of human rights – as opposed to a contributor to human rights abuses – then NGO advocates, civil society organisations and activist communities have argued that principles, protocols and penalties must be more effectively enshrined in the governance arrangements for these events. The awarding bodies that own MSEs have had an uneasy, and uncomfortable, relationship with human rights over the last half century. On one level, both the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA have claimed to be concerned with human rights, expressing a desire that those nations hosting their events adhere to the UDHR both in principle, and in practice. However, on the other, both organisations have shied away from accepting responsibility for monitoring, and acting upon, human rights abuses in the hosting of their main event assets.

However, over the last five years, there is evidence of growing public pressure, involving activists, social movements and the public in bidding nations, to hold their organisers and awarding bodies more accountable before and during these events; and some indications that the awarding bodies are being forced to respond. At the bidding stage, only two candidate cities remained in the process for the 2024 Olympic Games, after withdrawals from Boston, Hamburg, Rome and Budapest, following either successful opposition campaigns or public referenda (Boykoff, 2016; Lauermann, 2015; McGillivray & Turner, 2017; Oliver & Lauermann, 2017). In the lead up to, and during recent MSEs, host country and city residents have also sought to exploit the liminoid atmosphere created (Chalip, 2017) to explore otherwise contentious issues. In 2013, Brazil experienced mass public protests concerning that country's investment in MSEs (2013 Confederations Cup, 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games) in lieu of social welfare policies (Butler & Aicher, 2015). Based on the lessons learned from the stakeholder response in Brazil, the

IOC's most recent regulations require the host population's support for hosting future Olympic Games (IOC, 2014, 2017; Könecke, Schubert, & Preuß, 2016).

While recognising that MSEs can be deleterious, in terms of the human rights of those affected by their hosting, institutional and non-institutional actors have recently focused on how these events can be bid for, planned and delivered so as to contribute positively to social outcomes, such as empowering disadvantaged groups, enhancing local community infrastructures, and increasing community and sport participation (Carey, Mason, & Misener, 2011; Cashman, 2006; Gratton & Preuss 2008; Misener & Mason, 2008; Taks, Misener, Chalip, & Green, 2013). For example, over the last few years, the main institutional actors involved in MSEs (international sport organisations, sport federations, governments, host organisers and civil society groups) have come together to devise and implement policies and procedures that aim to more effectively ensure that these events are accountable for impact on the human rights of those affected by their hosting.

In January 2017, one of these international sport organisations, the IOC, made a commitment to incorporate human rights principles in its Host City Contract (HCC), the binding agreement between the awarding body and the host city. The IOC included an explicit reference to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP) and enshrined these within the HCC. In the same year, several other sports governing bodies also implemented human rights commitments, including the UEFA bidding requirements for the 2024 European Championships, the Commonwealth Games Federation's Human Rights Policy and 2022 Games Candidate City Manual, and FIFA's new Human Rights Policy. Since facing intense criticism for awarding the rights to host the World Cup to two nations with poor human rights records (Russia and Qatar), FIFA has made particularly good progress on building a human rights framework into

its activities. The EU Work Plan on Sport 2014-2017 identified good governance as a critical priority, with one target output being the:

Preparation of guiding principles relating to democracy, human rights and labour rights, in particular in the context of the awarding procedure of major sport events (European Union, 2014 [online])

The importance of good sport governance to European Union (EU) sport priorities was further defined in 2016, when the Netherlands hosted the EU Presidency. The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports published a Report on Integrity and Sport Events (Hover, Dijk, Breedveld, & van Eekeren, 2016), which focused on issues of transparency, good governance and the integrity of the actors involved in sport event planning and delivery. This report recommended that organisational integrity of sport events must be based on transparency (disclosure of requirements for bids, contracts and of decision-making procedures) and democratic processes (stakeholder participation, democratic procedures and support from the broader public). This report also emphasised the importance of the role that governments and bodies like the EU can play in enhancing integrity in sport events. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has also been active in this terrain, publishing guidelines on Leveraging Local Benefits from Global Sporting Events (OECD, 2016) and a recommendation adopted by EU member states on Global Events and Local Development (OECD, 2018).

Increased scholarly and journalistic attention has been paid to MSEs and human rights in the last five years. However, like other event-related research, there has been a tendency to focus on the event itself to the detriment of the wider human rights agenda. For example, Fleay (2012)

has cautioned scholars about their temporal interest in human rights around a specific MSE. She proposes that scholars need to come together with advocate and campaigning groups to ensure longer-term modes of advocacy and campaigning can be established, at each stage in the event process - from bidding, through planning and delivery, to final (legacy) reporting.

There is some evidence that this is already happening, through the establishment of coalitions like the Institute of Human Rights and Business (IHRB) and their MSE Platform project - which has now morphed into the independent Centre for Sport and Human Rights, whose membership includes the main influencers in the MSE space, including governments, inter-governmental organisations, sport governing bodies, sponsors, broadcasters, trade unions and civil society/national human rights institutions. This centre has already published guidelines for host cities on: Embedding Human Rights from Vision to Legacy; Sport Broadcasting and Human Rights; and, Championing Human Rights in the Governance of Sport Bodies. Moreover, initiatives like Terre des Hommes' Children Win (which works closely with Unicef UK) help hold MSEs to account in relation to specific rights - in this case those of children. Working closely with Terre des Hommes to understand the relationship between children's rights and social justice, Dowse et al. (2018) confirm support the need for children to be actively involved in planning and decision making around MSEs for their voices to be heard. These initiatives highlight the powerful possibilities associated with working collaboratively to address human rights issues.

The incremental progress that has been achieved in holding MSEs to account for the impact of their events on affected groups has been based largely on the activities of the advocacy and campaigning groups involved in initiatives like the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, and their effective use of marketing and media efforts to draw the wider public's attention to human rights infringements. However, while progress has been made, there is recognition that awarding bodies,

host cities and their national governments need to be monitored more effectively to ensure their commitments are translated into meaningful and sustainable outcomes. To illustrate the danger of slippage in following through on published principles and policies, Terre des Hommes recently urged FIFA to leave no stone unturned when enforcing human rights commitments made by Russia when bidding for the 2018 World Cup and for the 2026 bid nations. Marc Joly (2018 [online]), the then Head of the Children Win campaign, went on to suggest that:

there is a long way to go between just saying the right thing and successfully implementing these commitments on the ground in host cities and countries...vague references to trafficking, discrimination and freedom of expression are simply not satisfactory and show a worrying lack of understanding of the complexity involved.

Referring to the 2026 bid process, Joly (2018 [online]) said that:

If no significance is given to human rights within the process of awarding the 2026 World Cup, then we face the very real prospect of a technically ‘excellent’ bid not being held to account on the rights criteria which FIFA say they are now committed to upholding in their own statute.

At the heart of this example is the issue of enforcement, or hard power - how MSE awarding bodies, host cities and governments can be held to account over the commitments to the protection and promotion of human rights that they sign up to when bidding for events. Vague commitments, good intentions and future promises do little to effect change in the human rights environment.

NGOs, other advocacy groups and the media can play a role in monitoring and drawing the world's attention to human rights infringements but the development of clear pathways within MSE bidding, planning and delivery could make this process more systematic and, therefore, more likely to succeed.

### **Pathways to an embedded rights-based approach to MSEs**

The protection and promotion of human rights has become a concern to both awarding bodies and organisers of MSEs. The relationship between MSEs and the achievement of progressive social outcomes, including preserving human rights, starts with the bid and pre-planning stage. A recent publication from the MSE Platform (2018) provides potential bid cities with detailed advice about how they need to plan their vision, bid, planning, delivery and legacy activities to ensure human rights are foregrounded. How well the potential MSE host organiser, and its public and private partners, engages NGOs and those vulnerable populations often subjected to human rights abuses, is likely to determine the likelihood of success for attaining human rights goals. If socially excluded groups are included and have meaningful decision-making roles in establishing goals and processes (rather than simply assuming a trickle down benefit to these groups), then this may be more likely to lead to progressive social outcomes (Minnaert, 2012). If socially excluded groups are not meaningfully included, then they can still put pressure on the host stakeholders (via protests, media campaigns and other forms of resistance; Rowe, 2012). This process of engagement and resistance may lead to better organisation and empowerment of populations to advocate for broader social change (Rowe, 2012), but could also lead to negative outcomes, such as further oppression as hosts attempt to suppress public resistance



(Ekberg & Strange, 2017; Lenskyj, 2012), failed bids and bad public relations (Economy & Segal, 2008).

Practices of hosting MSEs may lead to positive or negative social outcomes depending on the level of inclusiveness and engagement (or response to public resistance) embedded in the planning and implementation process. To better understand the relationship between MSEs and human rights, we propose the exploration of particular mechanisms, or *pathways*, which we believe are likely to have an influence on the extent to which human rights are considered in the MSE context.

*Pathway 1: Organisational characteristics, arrangements and expectations about protecting and promoting human rights*

The initial leveraging of progressive human rights outcomes begins with the quality of governance arrangements in place for the MSE. In this pathway, the focus is on how relevant institutional actors, including international sport organisations, host governments, and host organising committees operate in the process of bidding for, planning and delivering the MSE. Expectations for MSEs to achieve the protection and promotion of human rights outcomes are dependent on good governance of the MSE (including transparency, responsiveness, and accountability).

The degree to which sport organisations and host city stakeholders open the governance of the MSE to other key actors, particularly those representing vulnerable and excluded populations, is critical to understanding the potential for democratisation and increased accountability of the MSE to deliver on positive social outcomes, preserving and promoting the rights of affected groups. Accountability in this case would be to both local stakeholders (e.g., citizens) and

international stakeholders (e.g., NGOs and rights holders). Ultimately, assurances of good governance and transparency by host organisations should be expected by awarding bodies as part of the bid process. Specifically, organisers need to adhere to international human rights standards, articulate clear responsibilities for each actor, and ensure that the rights of vulnerable groups are recognised, and protected - starting from the vision stage onwards.

However, as Minky Worden of HRW said in a presentation at the Play the Game 2017 Conference, “the world’s biggest human rights abusers increasingly want to host the biggest tournaments. Repressive leaders see hosting as a chance to sports wash their image, to build grand infrastructure, silence critics and shore up legitimacy and nationalism” (Worden, 2017 [online]). While the recent history of MSEs suggests that economic considerations have been overly influential in the awarding of the FIFA World Cup to Qatar, in particular, the development of human rights principles, policies and protocols by all MSE awarding bodies for bidding, planning and delivery suggests that change is afoot. However, enforcing the good governance requested by the EU, the OECD, HRW, AI and other advocacy groups is more problematic for this pathway. The development of revised bid technical requirements, new host city contracts and personnel appointed within the awarding bodies with responsibilities for human rights provides cautious optimism, but less successful attempts at remedy reminds us that enforcement and systematic monitoring remains crucial.

#### *Pathway 2: Practices of democratisation and voice to protect and promote human rights*

In addition to good governance, how institutions delivering MSEs engage with local stakeholders to ensure democratisation of goals and practices is critical to ensuring the efficacy of human rights agendas. Hover et al. (2016) argue that there is a growing demand, from host city

populations in particular, that basic democratic principles and procedures in decision-making are upheld in planning and delivering MSEs so that hosts can be held accountable by their primary stakeholders. Thus, meaningful stakeholder engagement can help advance the democratisation of the MSE planning process and improving levels of public participation in the decision-making process that will inform rights-based agendas. As the MSE Platform (2018) has suggested, “affected stakeholders should be provided with a clear understanding of how the event may impact them, have a chance to input into the process and know where and how they can go to access remedy if required” (p. 9).

Public participation can take myriad forms, but includes “providing information to the public, allowing the public to comment on decisions, or allowing the public to have a say in the decision itself” (Hover et al., 2016, p. 19). The nature and types of stakeholder participation in the formalised process is important to understanding the mechanisms by which public participation facilitates positive social outcomes related to human rights. Host organising stakeholders that suppress or even ignore the democratisation of decision-making processes open the MSE planning and delivery of MSEs to public resistance. Boykoff (2014, 2016) and Lauermann (2015) point out the tangible and intangible impacts to awarding bodies and hosts when this participation is not formalised as part of the MSE. There has also been a discussion regarding ‘activism of prevention’ taking place prior to potential hosts formally bidding on MSEs as well as failed bids and the oppositional legacy for the groups and organisations that campaigned (but failed) to prevent MSE bids from going ahead (e.g., London 2012; Sochi 2014; Rio de Janeiro 2016). Research focused on this pathway should explore effective approaches to include the voices of affected groups in the planning and delivery of MSEs. However, if those affected are not effectively represented, then

research enquiries into the formation of effective advocacy or oppositional groups at the bid stage, and through delivery is important.

*Pathway 3: Formalisation of the human rights agenda*

If MSEs include good governance and meaningful participatory inclusion opportunities for affected groups and related stakeholders, there also needs to be a commitment from awarding bodies to formalise policies that intentionally target positive human rights outcomes, enshrining institutional commitments to human rights and practices to achieve those goals. The key question related to this pathway is the extent to which the landscape of MSEs can be improved to ensure a progressive, rights-focused agenda is being pursued by awarding bodies and implemented in the formal institutions tasked with organising these events. As Transparency International (2014 [online]) suggests, “civil society, both international and national organisations and citizens must have a greater say in how major sport events are awarded and delivered from the beginning to end”. Awarding bodies must be willing to advocate and expect good governance by hosts, as well as the hosting organisation’s commitment to human rights principles (e.g., relating to labour laws, the rights of athletes, persons with a disability and LGBTQ communities) and that these principles are protected and promoted through the planning and delivery of MSEs. There is some evidence that awarding bodies (IOC, FIFA and CGF) now accept their responsibilities to enshrine international human rights standards in their MSE assets. Each has detailed human rights frameworks that include a commitment to ‘commit and embed’, ‘identify risks’, ‘take action’ and ‘communicate’ (MSE Platform, 2018). Furthermore, hosts are also now expected to publish their human rights policy commitments from the very beginning of the process, so that they can be assessed as guarantees in the same way that financial commitments are monitored. Finally, it is

imperative that these commitments extend beyond the core event requirements to include supporting infrastructure, sponsorship, broadcasters, supplier contracts, policing and security, and access to land and resources. For example, FIFA has enshrined international human rights standards in its main regulatory documents, statutes and the new host city contractual obligations. It has introduced a complaints mechanism, monitoring procedures and an escalation process to ensure that concerns can be logged and actions taken to hold host city governments accountable. Though these advances are to be welcomed and has produced some success in having legal processes dropped in Russia during the 2018 World Cup, FIFA itself acknowledges its limited influence in the host nation despite evidence suggesting that human rights infringements had taken place. The integration of human rights principles and standards into the bidding process and planning of future tournaments does provide more confidence going forward. For the 2026 World Cup, specific contractually binding commitments akin to the equivalent financial guarantees have been made and this, if monitored closely, could drive meaningful change. This pathway is critical to these events realising their potential to promote progressive human rights outcomes.

*Pathway 4: Sensitive Urban development to strengthen human rights*

An area where human rights abuses related to labour practices, rights to the city, freedom of assembly and access to public space is problematised is in the area of urban development. One of the main criticisms of MSEs is that they allow host organisers to pass exceptional legislations that change the spatial contours of the urban environment, including the creation of distinct militarised and securitised urban developments (Vainer, 2015).

The concept of large-scale urban development is often a strong rationale for hosting MSEs as the resulting regeneration is expected to lead to an improved competitive position for the host

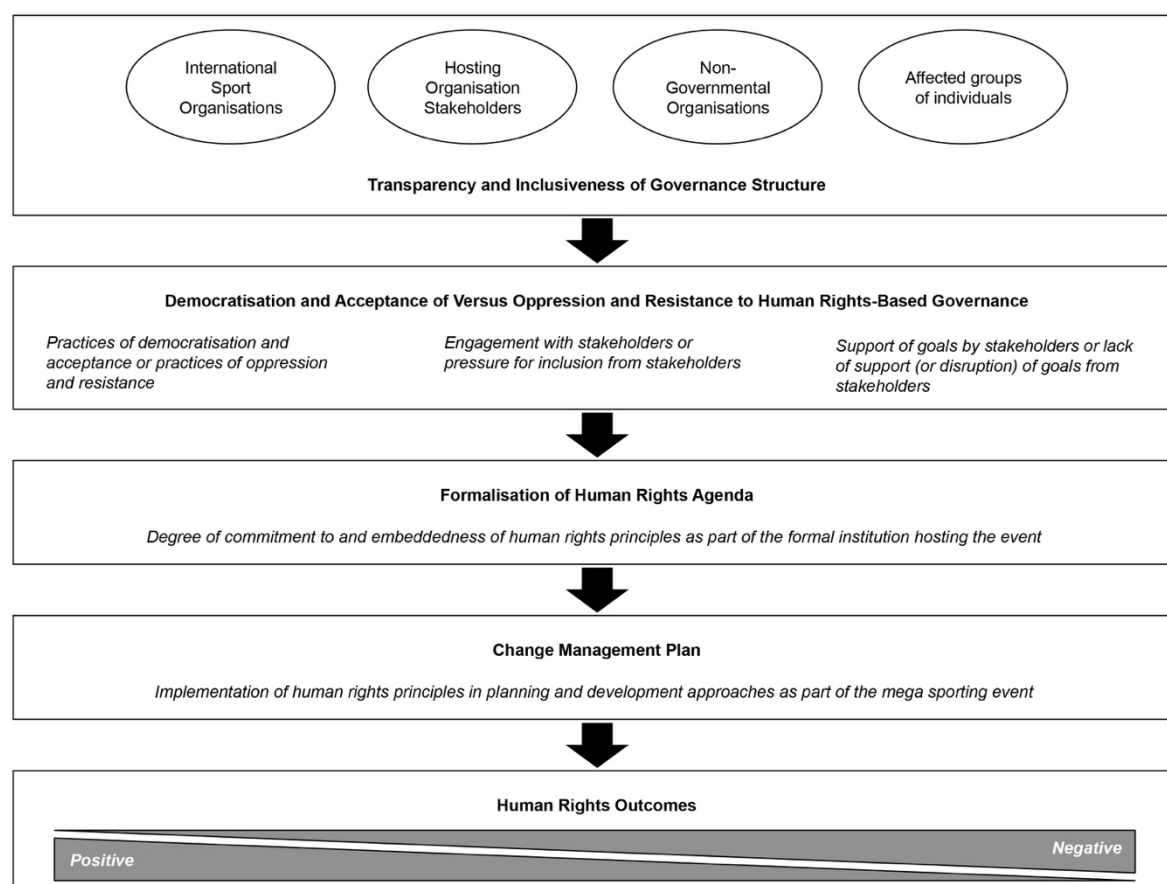
locale (Raco, 2014). Often the implementation of urban development initiatives associated with MSEs uses the urgency of the event as a justification to suspend conventional planning procedures and statutes and bypass participatory decision-making processes (Gaffney, 2015; Paton et al., 2012). This process favours the primacy of privileged stakeholders seeking exclusive economic gains in the decision making-process, while reducing the opportunities for input from local, poorer residents (Coaffee, 2015). This process is particularly salient for increasing the likelihood of human rights abuses associated with MSEs. The often-resultant gentrification and stratification of urban spaces, including forced evictions and mass displacements, has been associated with further marginalisation of vulnerable populations in host locales.

The examination of this pathway considers the extent to which MSE planning enables the development of more inclusive (or exclusive) public spaces, including the potential role of cultural programmes and spaces in enabling greater dialogue in relation to sensitive issues (e.g., racial discrimination, LGBTQ persecution and the effects of urban development on the most vulnerable). It is imperative that MSEs develop policies and procedures to ensure that the rights of vulnerable populations are not negatively impacted by the construction of MSE venues, transport infrastructures and other developmental changes to the urban realm. In the instances where discriminatory development approaches have been pursued by MSE hosts, research needs to better understand how marginalised populations have leveraged MSEs as a means of popular resistance to development agendas to achieve pro-social outcomes.

### **Conceptual model for rights-based MSE governance**

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for how human rights outcomes may be obtained through the implementation of the four specific pathways detailed previously. If MSEs include

good governance, democratic participation of stakeholders, formalisation of human rights agendas and urban development for strengthening human rights, then the potential for positive social change may be higher compared to a situation, in which these factors are not taken into account. When progressive human rights approaches are either ignored or resisted by awarding bodies and hosts via these pathways, then the potential for MSEs to exacerbate abuses and produce negative human rights outcomes will be greater.



**Figure 1: Conceptual model for rights-based MSE governance**

### **Actions speak louder than words: A rights-focused research agenda**

The purpose of the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1 is to provide a framework for MSE hosting that may better protect and promote human rights, and to introduce key mechanisms

requiring additional research to better understand the human rights legacies of MSEs. The MSE Platform (2018) has proposed a lifecycle approach to embedding human rights in MSEs and our conceptual model should be read in conjunction with the work of the advocate organisations seeking to generate change in how MSEs currently operate.

Caudwell and McGee (2018) have suggested that those concerned with the promotion and protection of human rights need to go beyond the “formal documenting of violations and abuses” (p. 5) to:

include a responsibility to ‘fact-find’ and information-share, to identify fault-lines in existing doctrines, to shape policy reforms, as well as to organise movements towards social change, to challenge injustice and to advocate on behalf of others...to enact such a human rights approach...is not merely to ‘study’ rights but to actively pursue their protection as part of a much larger commitment to shaping progressive social policy, public education and the realisation of human emancipation at large (Caudwell & McGee, 2018, p. 5)

Building on the conceptual model proposed here, we contend that it is important for researchers to work closely with institutional and non-institutional actors to undertake embedded, sensitive and longitudinal research enquiries if this approach is to lead to meaningful change. This requires engagement with a research agenda that is avowedly political and concerned with action - in the sense of action research (Lewin, 1946).

As Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 1) suggest, “action research does not start from a desire of changing others ‘out there’, although it may eventually have that result, rather it starts from an



orientation of change *with* others.” A commitment to action research, with its focus on practical solutions, is important for the way MSE researchers engage with research users. Action research requires a cyclical process of observation, reflection, planning and action (Jensen & Laurie, 2016).

For too long, academics have been satisfied to observe, describe and offer a critique of MSEs from a relatively distant and detached position. For example, the dilemma of sport participation requires little active involvement of the research beyond analysis of data already gathered by governments, sport bodies and health agencies. However, for research into human rights around MSEs to be credible and, more importantly, to initiate or accelerate change, it needs to be entangled more meaningfully both with those affected by human rights abuses and those advocating on their behalf. We, therefore, propose that for the conceptual model described here to be actionable, MSE researchers need to: form partnerships with non-governmental or civic society organisations; work with these organisations to devise the right research questions; and involve affected groups and organisations in the design of methods that address these research questions.

These approaches must also be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to the circumstances of affected groups and cognisant of the power relations that exist between these groups and powerful MSE stakeholders. It will also be important to ensure affected groups and their advocates are supported to develop their own research programmes working with academic partners with the long-term goal of taking control over their own research agendas. Researchers should also make research findings available in a form accessible to affected groups and advocate organisations and engage in dialogue with research users to ensure these findings can initiate or support change in the way MSEs are bid for, planned and delivered. A more involved, embedded, research agenda for MSE research requires academics to consider the extent of their commitment

to partners and affected groups, the ethical implications of their work, and the most useful research techniques to employ in investigating the rights-based agenda.

We propose that there is a need for more extensive use of ethnographic work, where researchers are immersed in the context being studied, over an extended period of time in order to ensure familiarity with the political, social and cultural histories that influence each MSE host environment. It is necessary to actively work with affected groups, organisers and governments through more participatory research approaches that involve an active engagement with planning and decision-making processes. This is important to ensure that those most affected by the hosting of MSEs are involved meaningfully and have a voice in planning and decision-making processes, from the earliest stages on. These involved perspectives also need to be complemented with methods that capture and document the changes that MSEs seek to bring about so that affected groups are able to contribute to planning and decision making based on credible research. For example, having access to geographic information system (GIS) mapping data related to pre-and post-event urban environments can help document the changing spatial arrangements in MSE host cities, over time or provide a spatial approach to security planning (Fonio & Pisapia, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship has increasingly recognised the potentially negative, exclusionary, and rights-infringing nature of sport, especially when considered within the context of MSEs. Scholars such as Horne (2018) point out that human rights have become the focal point of political agendas recently, which, we argue, should transcend into the scholarship on sport and MSEs. Previous research into MSEs and human rights has predominately focused on the rights of workers, silencing of activists in the host country, or forced evictions of citizens. Our proposed conceptual

framework is an attempt to guide future scholarship around the planning and governance of MSEs in order to mitigate the negative human rights issues that have become increasingly associated with MSEs.

Our first conclusion revolves around the four pathways we believe influence whether, and how, human rights are considered in the MSE context. They include the implementation of good governance, the democratic participation of stakeholders, the formalisation of human rights agendas, and sensitive urban development, providing pathways to a human rights-based agenda for bidding, planning and hosting MSEs. The effects may unfold depending on how well the host organisation engages with key stakeholders such as NGOs and vulnerable populations initially and how much of this is expected by the international sporting organisations and to what extent this can make the process easier or harder. If these groups are included and the area of initial inclusion is expanded, then the planning of goals and activities may be more likely to lead to progressive social outcomes. If affected groups (e.g., children, or those living in poverty) are not included, then organisers and their partners are likely to face pressure (via protests, media campaigns and other forms of resistance) and public support for goals and activities may be reduced. If progressive approaches to human rights are to be more effectively embedded in MSE governance, then commitments need to be accompanied by conversations, problem solving processes and remedy for those affected. FIFA's embedding of human rights commitments in the contractual obligations of bidding for, and delivering, the World Cup is a positive development in this regard and may serve as a starting point for such processes to take place.

Second, arising from our conceptual model and proposed research agenda, we also argue that both greater collaboration between MSE stakeholders and stricter adherence to internationally recognised standards, such as the UDHR and the UNGP on Business and Human Rights, are

needed if rhetorical statements from awarding bodies and host organisers are to be accountable to a wider set of actors. The main stakeholder actors in this space are sport organisations, hosting organisations and their public/private partners, NGOs, and vulnerable populations. There is a growing demand from NGOs and citizens for governments, and international sport organisations, to both mitigate human right issues and promote how these events can also positively impact on human rights. Some progress is evident, with the main institutional actors involved in MSEs now working together on initiatives like the Centre for Sport and Human Rights to devise and implement policies and procedures that will more effectively ensure that MSEs are held accountable for the impact of their events on the host environment and beyond. It is our contention that if researchers want to address some of the critical issues related to human rights and MSEs, it is imperative that key NGOs working in the rights sphere are involved in shaping the research agenda and monitoring its implementation. The importance of these collaborations cannot be understated. If changes in the human rights arena are to be sustainable and positive legacies realised, then high quality research must also be accompanied by creative, non-traditional ways of disseminating this knowledge (e.g., documentary film, blogs, social media posts and public engagement events). The dissemination activities must reach vulnerable target groups and the institutions that may help those groups insist on the consideration of human rights as they relate to their daily lives.

Finally, as academic researchers we are increasingly having impressed upon us the importance of our work having impact. We would recommend that, particularly where human rights are involved - which by its very nature requires involvement of the potentially affected groups - academics take a proactive approach, participating in action research that is partly aimed at achieving practical solutions, with engagement occurring over an extended period of time. This

approach, which as stated earlier is avowedly political and concerned with genuine action, is a key way in which MSE stakeholders can be held to account for their actions and we, as researchers, can achieve the impact from our work that we are being increasingly pressured to achieve.

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